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INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE  
RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS 3445  
RUEHNJ/AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA 1542  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0720  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L NIAMEY 000821

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/W DENNISON/HEFLIN  
PARIS FOR AF WATCHER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/25/2018  
TAGS: [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [NG](#)  
SUBJECT: NIGER: ACCIDENTAL LANDMINE EXPLOSION AT "LAYING  
DOWN ARMS" CEREMONY

REF: A. NIAMEY 819  
[1](#)B. NIAMEY 815  
[1](#)C. NIAMEY 800

Classified By: Ambassador Bernadette M. Allen, Reasons: 1.4 b and d

[1](#)1. (U) Summary. On the morning of Sunday, August 24, Government of Niger (GON) authorities and Revolutionary Armed Forces of the Sahara (FARS) rebels (of Toubou ethnicity) held a ceremony in which FARS rebels turned over hundreds of weapons (landmines, guns, grenades, etc.). Regrettably, the leader of a nongovernmental organization (NGO) Agir Pour Un Developpement Durable (ADD) who was facilitating the arms handover, inadvertently caused a landmine to explode, killing himself and creating a chain reaction of explosions that injured over 40 others (civilians and military), notably local officials and military officers. The ceremony replicated others conducted over the past year that were later aired on television to show the rebels' interest in national unity. On the August 24 Tele-Sahel (public television station) evening news, Minister of Communications Ben Omar (the GON spokesperson) expressed the GON's condolences to the deceased's family members and reported that the injured had been hospitalized in Zinder and Niamey. The injured Governor accompanied the most severe cases medevaced by plane to Niamey. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Embassy personnel inquiries indicate that the landmine explosion in Goure, located in the southern region of Zinder (about 600 miles east of Niamey), was an accident caused by carelessness. Remarks delivered by GON officials and others at the "laying down arms" ceremony had been completed and the speakers were proceeding to view the arms cache when the NGO ADD leader (Moussa Bidal) is reported to have inadvertently set off a landmine. It still remains unclear whether he stepped on an anti-personnel mine or was handling a landmine when it went off. (Comment: Embassy has seen several such ceremonies televised this past year and has taken note of the careless way these hundreds of arms and landmines have been handled and displayed, usually passed and stacked on rugs or straw mats on the ground for open viewing. It is surprising, in light of the lack of care in handling the "aged" weaponry that the August 24 incident was the first accident to have occurred at one of these ceremonies. It also is fortunate that the human toll was not higher, given the crowd reportedly in attendance. End note.)

[1](#)3. (C) Ambassador spoke with Governor of Zinder Yahaya Yandaka (still in Niamey) on August 25 to express her regret in learning of the injuries to the Governor and others, and the death of Mr. Moussa. The Governor reported that he was doing fine and resting. He stated he could have been treated

in Zinder but wanted to accompany the six severely injured persons medically evacuated to Niamey, as well as inform President Tandja what had occurred. Among the severely injured are a National Assembly delegate, a former GON minister, the Zone III Military Commander (military), the Commander's bodyguard and two other military officers. Yahaya reemphasized that he was not among the severely injured and stated that in addition to the deceased (Moussa) the most severely injured person is the Zone III Military Commander who is suffering from third degree burns. He stated, consistent with other accounts provided to Embassy team members, that Moussa had accidentally caused the initial landmine to explode creating a chain reaction of explosions from other landmines stacked in close proximity. The Embassy's FSN Political Assistant was able to contact Goure Mayor Oumarou Gounga (in Zinder) on August 25, who was at home recovering and reported that he was feeling better. He also called the incident an accident, but said the GON expects to investigate to try to determine its cause.

14. (U) The Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice (MNJ) has made claims on its website (operated out of Paris) that the tragedy was no accident, but post considers as credible the eyewitness reports from persons on the scene in Zinder at the time of the explosion.

Minimize considered.  
ALLEN